DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 429 894 SO 030 571

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TITLE Teaching Secondary School Geography with a Focus upon National Images.
PUB DATE 1998-00-00
NOTE 21p.; Light type throughout.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Class Activities; Critical Thinking; Curriculum Development; Foreign Countries; *Geography; *Geography Instruction; Global Approach; *Instructional Effectiveness; Learning Activities; Secondary Education; Social Studies; Textbook Content; *World Views
IDENTIFIERS Great Britain; *Nation States; *National Image; South Korea

ABSTRACT

The world is made up of over 185 nation-states. This paper offers advice for geography teachers and students on how to focus their study of some nations in terms of their national images. The goals for studying national images are (1) to understand how national images are constructed and influence thought and behavior; (2) to test the linkage between perspective and reality in the images that students have of other nations and their own; (3) to critically examine the national images served to them uncritically by their geography textbooks; and (4) to understand how many nations today are consciously trying to redefine their national images to be able to sell themselves and their products and services in the global marketplace. The paper provides examples of national images, using South Korea (through images in textbooks, the media, national products, and national images); and Great Britain (under Prime Minister Tony Blair) and its campaign to change its national image. Activities for geographic study that center on national image are strategies that students find interesting and challenging. Contains 10 references. (BT)

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ED 429 894

# Teaching Secondary School Geography with a Focus upon National Images

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SO 030 571

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**Teaching Secondary School Geography with a Focus upon National Images**

Today, the world is made up of well over 185 nation-states. Some are tiny; some are huge. Many are powerful; others struggle to ward off neighbors. Some are historical nations, well known to educated persons, whereas others have recently emerged from imperial control or the break-up of larger political entities. Despite these differences as well as varying political systems and economic persuasions, each nation in the world community shares equal status in international law. They are sovereign. They appear on world maps. They are listed in the indices of secondary school students' world geography textbooks and, therefore, are quite likely one way or another to be the subject of students' systematic study.

Geography teachers and students might well focus their study of some nations in terms of their national images. The goals for such a study are:

- 1) To understand better how such images are constructed and then influence thought and behavior,

- 2) To test the linkage between perspective and reality in the images that students have of other nations and their own,

- 3) To examine the national images served to them uncritically by their geography textbooks, and

- 4) To understand how many nations today are consciously trying to redefine their national images to be able to sell themselves and their products and services in the global marketplace.

**Why National Images?**

We know that people gradually accumulate and carry about with them various information bits and experiences about other countries as well as their own. This information is organized as mental images of the world, its peoples and places. These images contain more than organized information; they reflect judgments about the meaning of that information, about past feelings and evaluations, and about memories from personal experience and received opinion. Once processed in peoples' minds, the images are used to acquire, store and use new information. The images function as internal models of the world, wherein the quality of the images influences the way new information is received and the way a person thinks and even acts.

Researching rather elite Americans' images of India and China in the 1950s, Harold Isaacs (1958) was particularly fascinated by mental images that had become fixed and were rarely opened to critical reflection. For the participants in his research, images of China were often created by Pearl Buck, New Yorker cartoons, and W.W.II

II news photographs. Likewise, images of India were rural, exotic, and British colonial-oriented, invariably shaped by exposure to Rudyard Kipling and other British authors and cartoons, including many with Mohandas Gandhi dressed in a "sheet." Isaacs concluded:

> All images are shaped by the way they are seen, a matter of setting, timing, angle, lighting, and distance. Images carried about by some people for a whole lifetime may have been fixed by a singe exposure dating, perhaps, from an experience deep in the past. Or else they may emerge from a whole collection of pictures that a person takes with the mind over the years and which come out in looking much the same because the person's mental setting is fixed, like a fixed-focus box camera (40).

In their famous UNESCO study, William Buchanan and Hadley Cantril (1953) explored images of other nations through public opinion data, unlike Isaacs' more personal, survey and interview techniques.

In his 1922 book, entitled *Public Opinion*, Walter Lippmann called the images in peoples' heads stereotypes—images that we form and use over and over again when confronting new situations without critical reflection. He cautioned that persons must be aware that, as observers, ours is always a perspective, not the reality.

> ...even the eyewitness does not bring back a naïve picture of the scene. For experience seems to show that [observers] bring something to the scene which later they take away from it, that oftener than not what they imagine to be the account of an event is really a transfiguration of it. Few facts in consciousness seem to be merely given. Most facts in consciousness seem to be partly made. Reports [by eyewitnesses are] the joint product of the knower and the known. For the most part, we do not see first and then define; we define first and then see (59).

As is clear from these quotations, the early concern for national images focused upon the accuracy and reliability of the images held. The hope of most researchers was to discern ways to make persons more aware that their images were perspectives on reality, not reality itself, and to be more reflective about the influence of those images on their thought and behavior. Beyond knowing and understanding, those researchers (like teachers) desired an emancipatory rationality in which human beings could stand back and reflect critically on their national images and the consequences for thought and behavior. As the distinguished humanities professor Northrop Frye (1981) observed in a keynote lecture at the American Association for the Advancement of Science:

> First, practically all the reality we wake up facing is a human construct left over from yesterday. Second, some of that construct is rubbish, and needs to be

> cleared away. The important difference is not between reality and illusion, but between what we can make real and what it is time to get rid of (131).

In that view, national images developed from experience, study, and exposure to information bits and evaluations. The bases for national images could often be found various clusters of criteria -- military power (or lack of it), influence in history, contributions to cultural development, economic or material standard of living, involvement in well-known historical events (e.g., the Holocaust, space exploration, empires, the Industrial Revolution), and well publicized actions, for good or ill.

With the new millennium, however, nations have learned that, like commercial enterprises, they may attempt to create images of their choice in the minds of others (Nair 1998). Because national image influences the acceptance of a nation's views in world politics, national acceptability in international alliances, openness of others to exchange of capital investments and other resources, and the commercial viability of its products and services in foreign markets, nations are consciously redefining their national attributes. Public relations strategists, marketers, and advertising agencies have new clients. In this view, national images may be created, or at the least, directed and shaped.

Nations have always had national images that emerged as they acted and reacted in the world community and other governments and people attended to these behaviors.

Altruism and despotism, wet and dry, productive and unproductive, developed and undeveloped, stable and unstable, modern and rural, rich and poor all are opposites that have shaped images. Today telecommunications contribute at the push of a button to changing national realities – exchange rates, the transfer of credit, the movement of troops, price changes, the movement of capital and technology and other conditions of life. So it is that people in almost all nations have the opportunity to know more about one another than ever before in history.

Today national image is an important contributor to foreign customers' purchasing decisions. National image affects marketing of a nation's goods and services in the global marketplace.

An annual worldwide poll, the Bozell-Gallup Poll, defines national image as the perceived quality of its products. Along with price, communication messages, and aesthetics, there is a predisposition to purchase or not purchase a product or a service based upon the nation of origin. For three years running, 1994-1996, the Bozell-Gallup found that consumers around the world gave the highest quality ratings to goods manufactured in Japan, Germany, and the United States. High ratings in manufactured product quality produce a "halo effect," in which a reputation for well-manufactured goods spills over into entertainment, culture, and service exports. A perception of high quality in one area creates a halo for other national attributes. Of course, the converse is true as well – a low perception of quality in

one area negatively affects ratings in others. A good example is the continuing struggle of Indonesia to deal with its rupiah crisis, vast governmental corruption, cronyism, and a banking collapse. As I sat in Malang, East Java, writing this essay, my wife in Tallahassee had as much information as any private Indonesian citizen had about what was happening and why it was happening. Alas, Indonesia, its people and institutions were loosing any halo that they had enjoyed under the Soeharto regime. CNBC and CNN International flash facts and impressions about the world, and buttons are pushed in the world's banks, foreign offices, and minds of viewers everywhere. In contrast, any visitor may see the image re-invention process at work with the huge, impressive constructions of the Chinese government in developing nations. The grand Supreme Court Building in downtown Windhoek, Namibia, and Martyrs Stadium in President Laurent Kabila's Kinshasa, the capital city of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, come to mind as two of the many examples in Africa.

**Action in the Classroom**

The following examples of national image study in geographic education can be replicated by teachers and students anywhere. While the specifics of teaching may vary according the contexts, teachers need always to keep five fundamental queries about national images in their geographic education programming:

1. What are our images of other nations and our own?
2. How are our national images constructed?
3. Why were these images constructed? What is their purpose?
4. What are the consequences of holding these images? and
5. How can we make our national images more reliable to lessen any adverse consequences of holding them?

### *A National Image Lesson in South Korea*

In July 1995, I had an opportunity to teach one class of forty-five sophomore boys at Hyundai High School in Seoul, Republic of Korea. I decided to focus on national images. After appropriate courtesies, I discussed with them the idea of national images and how our images may be encapsulated in visual symbols. To make the point more personal, I asked them about the formal visual symbols of Hyundai High and the meaning and the source of those formal symbols. Then, I asked about the informal symbols that they had of their high school. Each student was asked to draw those images on some scratch paper that I brought to class. The sharing of these images was, shall we say, joyful and great fun. Now that I knew that they understood the concept of national image, I asked them to draw five symbols to represent their images of the United States of America. The students knew a lot about the United States and were interested in knowing more. Each student drew

his images and was anxious to share, often with questions to me about the United States. The images were polite and mostly positive, revealing students' perspectives. All had a symbol or two related to freedom and political democracy – the Statue of Liberty, the Capitol Building in Washington, the Bald Eagle, the Golden Gate Bridge, Mount Rushmore, the President and White House. Military power and nuclear capability were well represented. The students knew that the Korean War continued with intense United States-South Korean cooperation in defense, and the presence of the US nuclear shield. Hyundai High School was, after all, not more than fifty kilometers from the demilitarized zone. More than a few images revealed worries about nuclear weaponry and ambivalence about depending upon others for protection.

Michael Jordan and the NBA had the attention of these Korean lads. They followed the NBA, knew players' names, and loved to play basketball themselves. The Los Angeles Lakers were favorites, but it was clear from our discussion that the students focused on Los Angeles and the New York metropolitan area, two sites of large Korean and Korean-American populations. The shape of the United States was cited, as an indicator of size –the vastness of the United States vis-à-vis the smaller and divided Korea Peninsula. Images included the industrial capacity of the United States with sporty and powerful automobiles and powerful commercial symbols for consumer products sold worldwide such as Coca-Cola and the Marlboro Man. The students were well aware of the divisions in American

society based upon race and ethnicity. The students knew about the discrimination against Koreans in the United States, often with personal stories. They knew the details of Koreatown and East Central Los Angeles. They noted crime (and some AIDS) as profound features of our national image. Many had visited the United States or had relatives in the States.

The views of those Korean adolescents are similar to the characterization of the national image of the United States by James Kurth (1997). Kurth called the United States an adolescent empire, that continually updated its image by reinventing and redefining itself. Like adolescents, Kurth claimed the United States' image centered on drive, social and geographic mobility, change, aggressiveness, and self-confidence, with a predilection for democratic and economic participation, taking action, leading, and reforming to clean out social injustice. The superpower macho image was attractive to the Korean students, but no more so that their emphasis on American fads and fashions and the superstars of the NBA, Hollywood's films, music (MTV), entertainment, TV, and Disneyland with Mickey Mouse as its international media star. A special place was reserved by Kurth and the Korean students for the American hamburger – a symbol of mobility, quality, and service. It was not lost on Kurth or the Koreans that the national image of the US is also cast in the global use of American English in telecommunications, media, and the Internet.

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In that session, the students also considered their images of "Korea." The shape of Korea, its size, and its partition were major features of their national image. Almost every student drew a map of the entire Korean Peninsula, partitioned. One cited the conflict with Japan over Toq-do Island (Takeshima Island) and its seabed riches in the East Sea (Sea of Japan). Many noted the relative freedom in economics and personal life when contrasted with the North. They were proud of the globalization of South Korea's vigorous economy and the presence of the Republic of Korea in the world's leading economies, especially in construction, engineering, design, automobiles and electronics. Interestingly, these male sophomores knew and respected symbols of traditional Korean life. It was not that they wanted to be traditional (anything but!). They did, however, want to know about their past and desired to have the artifacts of their heritage preserved, showcased, and proclaimed globally. In their national image, Korea possessed a mature, distinctive culture and was taking its hard-earned place as a modern nation with a global perspective.

### *Received Images from Textbooks and Media*

Children and youth learn the basis for many national images early in their lives. The multiculturalism of North American communities and TV representations provides constant reminders of the difference and diversity in the world community of nations. School subjects add further to the emergence of national images, as do the causal

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interactions of life in most communities. Although students will not possess images of each of the world's nations, a teacher has a plethora of national imagery to work with in any world geography classroom.

World geography textbooks are arranged into chapters and units that reflect regions or clusters of nations in close proximity to one another (e.g., Southeast Asia, Western Europe, and Central America). Students might first examine their textbook's presentation of one nation in a region, using the words and pictures to discern the national image offered. Any biases? Is the imagery historic or contemporary? What is rubbish and needs "to be gotten rid of," in Northrop Frye's words? What needs more exploration?

In my teaching, I often use tourist brochures and have students examine a nation's image, as offered in text and color photography by the publicists of its National Tourist Board. Following the students' analysis, I work with them to extract data from the school media center so that they might discern the reality from the rubbish. Today, I would also use news clips from CNN and CNN International news reports to the same effect. CNN World Report, moderated by Asieh Namdar, yields a steady stream of images from around the globe, each ready for critical study.

Another strategy for teaching and learning about national image is to use adjective lists as a class survey instrument. Before reading their texts or initiating study of, say,



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Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, students select five adjectives for each political unit from a list of thirty adjectives (e.g., cheerful, sly, energetic, benign, brave, pugnacious, intelligent, hard-working, and domineering). Students compare their lists individually and in small groups, trying to explain how and why they came to possess those national images. They, then, turn to their textbooks and other sources to check the reality of their imagery. They also do a critical-appreciative reflection on the national images embedded in their textbook. Students always seem to relish and learn from this exercise.

Each of these teaching strategies is amenable to the exchange of data with teachers and geography students in the nations whose national image is examined. E-mail and other Internet opportunities exist to facilitate the exchange and responses. Students might exchange textbook chapters on the nation under study with students from that nation for review. They can exchange data on their surveys of national images, for comparison and for discussions of why images are formed, the reality and rubbish in the images, and the consequences of the imagery in their minds.

### *National Products and National Images*

During the early 1960s, when I was teaching world geography to seventh graders in Delaware, I recall a national image incident. In the midst of our study of Japan one morning, Ralph, a rather Gleasonesque character, announced to the class that the Japanese could only

produce junk. Ralph went on to describe his family's consumer behavior, ticking off products, their quality, and prices. He was quite descriptive (and animated) about the failure of several products. Other students quickly joined in, with descriptions and evaluative judgments of Japanese products. That was a teachable moment! I tried to ask why the Japanese sent such products to the United States and why Americans purchased them. The students offered answers, mostly based upon their views of the Japanese (and "Orientals") as sly, tricky businesspersons. Most of the students perceived Japanese plastic products as a threat, a new Pearl Harbor, rather than as a consumer opportunity. I offered an analogy, asking why in Nineteenth Century America, New England's watch manufacturers could make profits selling dollar pocket watches in Switzerland, the nation that then produced the finest watches in the world. The point was that the economic unit was not the watch itself, but the various quality grades of watches at various prices. Switzerland's worldwide watch market was at the high quality end, and the Americans' market was at the dollar watch end (low quality but affordable and dependable, for a time). The Japanese in the 1960s, like the American watch manufacturers earlier, had found their market niche. I do not recall Ralph ever getting the point. Later several students reported on family discussions, wherein their parents gave other examples of products and national images.

Today, manufactured goods from Japan receive the highest marks for quality in Bozell-Gallup polls. In the nineteen

nations surveyed, Japanese products received very positive evaluations from 41.2% of the respondents. German products were second, with the United States third. Britain, France, Canada, and Italy follow in a cluster well below the three leaders.

Although Ralph is a successful businessperson today and must certainly know about high-end Japanese products, geography students still in school might examine the data on the Internet (Bozell-Gallup Poll, 1997), and survey consumers in their area about their consumption of goods from the nineteen nations on the list (or others). Students might write questions to collect the national image of manufactured goods from those nations. Do their data confirm the Bozell-Gallup findings? Are their anomalies? How do students account for these?

### *Re-inventing National Images Lessons*

Impressed by successful advertising in commercial arenas of life and the massive employment of public relations strategists ("Spin Doctors"), many nations are trying to recreate their national images (Nair 1998). Ireland and Chile, Spain and Australia are but four examples. This has been most apparent in the tourism industry. Now, with the globalization of economic competition, more is at stake in the recreation of national images. Under Prime Minister Tony Blair and his new Labor Party, Great Britain is the most vigorous major nation working on its image. In the old view Britain was the land of woolens, collie dogs,

queens in palaces, aristocrats in ancestral estates, the changing of the guard, the Tower of London, the English language, political stability, the home of the Industrial Revolution, innovative social welfare programs, and excellence in higher education. In recent decades, however, this national image faded to views of a declining empire with a yacht-less queen, football hooligans, lager louts, rock bands, indolent urban youth, and other less than desirable attributes. A portion of the public perceived Britain as backward-looking and aloof. As a tourist destination, Britain was seen as worthy, but boring.

Today, Britain addresses the gap in its image between the Britain of the past, at home and abroad, and the reality of the modern Britain at the turn of the millennium. It wants to be perceived as innovative, outward-looking, far-sighted, diverse, and creative. Britain stresses is creative industries in music, design, architecture, and motor sports. While Napoleon may have dismissed Britain a nation of shop-keepers, today's image-builders know that ninety-nine percent of Britain's 3.7 million businesses employ fewer than fifty staff. It is a nation of small and medium-sized businesses which generate ideas and jobs. Increasingly, these businesses are in fast growing fields such as computer services, digital communication, Internet services, multimedia entertainment, biotechnology, tourism, and design (Evamy 1997).

According to Leonard (1997), the goal is to offer the world an image of Britain as vibrant adolescent, grounded in six concepts that are unique to Britain (after Nair 1998)

1. Britain is an intellectual and a commercial center, a global hub for goods and ideas, as well as a bridge between Europe and the Americas, Africa, and modernizing Asia;
2. Britain is a creative island with superb intellectual traditions which values individuality, eccentricity, non-conformity, and new ideas in all fields from architecture to fashion, from music to engineering;
3. Britain is a hybrid nation mixing old and new elements into new ideas and products, new social and foreign policies, and in this process re-energizes itself;
4. Britain is a nation of entrepreneurs committed to innovative commercial development at home and abroad, often in concert with innovators from other national communities;
5. Britain is a nation of silent revolutions were stable institutions are not unchanging, but reform and reorganize into new ways of running a successful, democratic society; and
6. Britain is the nation of fair play.

Teachers and students might select a nation, examine its national image in the minds of fellow students, or adults, and, if the nation needs re-invention, the students might

interview public relations and advertising persons among their parents on in the school community, to develop a draft re-invention plan. The Leonard analysis of Britain's strengths serves as a model – what are the national strengths, what are the negative image features to be overcome, and then, layout an action plan.

**Conclusion**. Activities for geographic study that center on national image are strategies that students find interesting and challenging. Of course, national imagery is not all there is to good geographic education. But, despite the textbooks that too many geography students must use, they will develop intellectual skills and find their geography study significant, interesting, and useful. These are outcomes which all geographic educators will honor.

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